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Author: [IWPR staff](#)

IWPR reporters begin probing underreported subjects as part of new programme aimed at improving accountability of officials.

IWPR-trained reporters this week filed the first stories for a series of investigative journalism exposes that are part of a year-long project to develop watchdog reporting skills and encourage Afghan journalists to delve deeper into the issues that affect their audiences.

The approximately 20 stories that will result from this United States State Department-funded project aim to highlight a wide range of topics that have historically been underreported by the Afghan media, from shortfalls in the education and healthcare sectors, to abuses of land rights and less visible forms of official corruption.

The stories are being reported from across Afghanistan and explore issues of importance to both rural communities and those living in the country's urban centres.

They will be broadcast over the next few months on local radio in the Dari and Pashto languages so as to reach the widest-possible audience, as well as appear online as text and multimedia features, also in English.

A key component of the project is to encourage a dialogue through audience feedback in the form of radio call-in shows or panel discussions involving the journalists and important figures in the issues about which they reported.

The reporters producing these stories are among the nearly 100 journalists who were trained as part of the project in a series of investigative journalism workshops held over several months throughout the country, including in restive Helmand province.

These reporters were selected on the strength of the stories they pitched at these workshops, and are being closely mentored by IWPR trainers Munir Mehraban and Seth Meixner, an American journalist.

Mehraban has been a leading media trainer since 2002 with organisations like Internews, the Pajhwok news agency and IWPR. Prior to this, he worked as a reporter for two Kabul-based newspapers.

Since 1999, Meixner has worked extensively in post-conflict and developing countries, most recently leading the transition of The Phnom Penh Post, Cambodia's oldest English-language newspaper, into an award-winning daily publication. He also worked with the international wire service Agence France-Presse, reporting from Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Middle East.

"Up to now the Afghan media is busy producing breaking news, rarely investigative journalism. But what is going on behind the breaking news – the back of the story – is too important," Mehraban said.

"Afghanistan needs issues to be investigated. Investigative reporting can create a steady flow of information for the people and explain the 'How' and 'Why' of an issue. Only breaking news is not enough for people to get a complete picture of Afghanistan.

"With this we can highlight information that would otherwise be kept in the dark."

He said that investigative journalism is a new concept among the Afghan press corps, and is a format that needs to be encouraged through projects like IWPR's investigative training programme.

"We're building a lot of capacity among Afghan journalists. Investigative journalism is very new to the media sector here. After these reporters receive this training they can begin undertaking this type of journalism on their own," he said.

Location: [Afghanistan](#)

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